



Robins Design Q & A

Advice from our Lead Designer

What advice do you have for someone who is thinking about starting a business at home as a graphic designer?

I worked from home during my first year in business, but I quickly moved the operation to a studio in a business complex. If you are serious about starting a business, I recommend that you get a studio as soon as you can. Although there are a few cost-saving advantages to working at home, there are many major disadvantages that will hinder your business. Most importantly, you are in business, and you want the respect and credibility of being an established and professional company. Get a business license and bank account, put your regular workers on payroll, list your business in the telephone directory, etc. Graphic design is all about image and communication. Think about what kind of image you want to communicate to your clients about your company.

How can I land a graphic design job with a magazine?

There is an excellent reference that is published annually that tells you how to get an interview with design studios, art directors, book publishers, magazines, etc., and contains other valuable information. It's called "Artist's & Graphic Designer's Market: Where and How to Sell Your Illustrations, Fine Art, Graphic Designs & Cartoons."

How does graphic design affect the media?

I believe that design doesn't affect media; media affects design. Media is targeting certain audiences. Once you have researched and have a grasp of what that audience likes, what things are important to them, etc., then you design for that audience based on your findings.

What is the difference between Graphic Design and Web Design? Are they the same thing? How are they different? Are they two different majors?

When people talk about Graphic Design, they are usually referring to print design. Designing for the web was actually a form of graphic design, too; but it was graphic design for a completely different medium. Web design has evolved so much. What you learn in graphic design courses don't usually cover the information technology (IT) skills you'll need to design for the web. And web design courses don't usually cover all of the skills you'll need to design for print. So they are two different majors.

Do I need to be good at math to be a graphic designer?

It depends on what area of graphic design you plan to specialize in. But for the average project, advanced math wouldn't be required. You will need to be comfortable enough with percentages, fractions, and conversions to quickly figure out precise measurements on a calculator.

Do you work alone or with a group? If you work independently, how do you get your clients?

Our team consists of the lead designer (myself), a design assistant, and a business development manager. We work with associate designers in teaming arrangements or as a subcontractor. We job out to subcontractors when necessary.

I began operating Robins Design in 1992 through referrals from other graphic designers. Our reputation with our existing clients has helped us to continue receiving 75% of our work through referrals. Our telephone directory ad brings 5% of our work, and the rest is through low-key marketing.

For additional tips and guides, visit www.robinsdesign.com

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What are the pros and cons of new and old technology as it pertains to graphic design?

With the widespread use of desktop computers for graphic design in the 1980s, designers no longer had to perform design tasks manually. Computer graphic design also allowed them to take more control over tasks that before needed to be done by others. They were able to accomplish tasks in hours/days instead of days/weeks and with added precision. The 1990s brought a lot of time-saving conveniences and better tools. The common practice of communicating and receiving text files via email meant less meeting time with clients and less typing. Designers were able to download stock photos instantly. USB plug-and-play made computer use much friendlier. More powerful computers and software improved design capabilities. Costly mistakes were avoided with the use of utilities such as pre-flight software. And there were more typeface selections than you could ever use, although some people go overboard by trying to use as many as they can.

The down side of all this great technology is that an untrained person has more control over the process. Clients might provide designers with inferior photographs and images, unedited text, and self-produced graphs/charts. But more often than not, they should have used the services of professional photographers, editors/copywriters, and artists. Clients may set unrealistic deadlines, because they believe the computer work is the main function, not understanding that much of the work is conceptualizing, brainstorming, researching, etc. Many people don't even seek the help of a professional designer, thinking that the software does most of the job. Designers can spend too much time on tasks because they get wrapped up in the technology. They might "over-create" a

design that ends up being too difficult to print, or at least makes the pressmen's job a nightmare. Because designers can generate concepts faster, they might provide more than are necessary, instead of refining a few key concepts. Both clients and designers can rely too much on the technology – performing spell-check in lieu of proofreading, expecting that what they see on the computer screen or inkjet proof is exactly how the final printed piece will look, etc.

Is your job exciting and fulfilling?

My job has variety, and I think variety is exciting. It's rewarding to see the finished product, receive kudos from clients, and know that the pieces I design play a part in my clients' success.

What advice do you have for someone considering a career in this field?

You must enjoy a fast-paced environment, computers, talking to people, and learning new things. There are many different areas of design that you can get into. As in many other industries, the field of design evolves. That means you should keep up with changes and be willing to evolve with it. Keep current on where design is moving. A few years ago, I had no idea that I would be designing Web sites. Build a good rapport with other designers and don't hesitate to ask questions. Keep in touch and network with your old classmates. If you decide to venture out on your own, learn how to run a business. And finally, don't become too attached to your designs. The purpose of design is to enhance the client's success; if you can't justify the design, you have to be willing to alter it in order to meet the objectives.

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